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Marking a Milestone

Twenty-five years ago, Pennsylvania's General Assembly voted, almost unanimously, to establish the Keystone Recreation, Park and Conservation Fund—a permanent source of funding dedicated to establishing and maintaining state parks and trails, nature preserves, libraries and historic sites. The Nature Conservancy, together with a coalition of partners, played a key role in creating the Keystone Fund, which has allocated more than \$11 million to our projects in 10 Pennsylvania counties since 1993. Today we mark this important milestone and share how you can help to ensure the Keystone Fund continues to benefit nature and people in Pennsylvania.

Bill Keuzel

*Pennsylvania Executive Director
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Keystone Fund: A Gift that Gives Back

Every dollar invested by the Keystone Fund leverages more than three dollars for local parks and trails, historic sites, libraries and conservation.

“This includes support for many of our nature preserves,” says Liz Johnson, The Nature Conservancy’s director of land management in Pennsylvania. “These places attract interest, which can also boost local economies. Towns across the state feel the ripple effect of the Keystone Fund.”

Among dozens of other projects, the Keystone Fund made it possible for TNC to:

- Acquire the 350-acre Cove Mountain Preserve near Harrisburg as part of an effort to permanently protect land along the Kittatinny Ridge, one of the most important wildlife corridors in the northeastern United States.
- Conduct scientific research at the Tannersville Cranberry Bog Preserve, where a guided tour serves as rite of passage for every fourth-grade student in Monroe County.
- Offer technical support to the French Creek watershed conservation planning and protection partnership in Erie and Crawford counties.
- Employ conservation tools like controlled burns to maintain globally rare barrens located at the Eales Preserve at Moosic Mountain in Lackawanna County.

According to Johnson, the Eales Preserve also attracts outdoor enthusiasts who hike and ride mountain bikes among the unique, stunted barrens shrubs and rock outcroppings, adding, “The Keystone Fund has been instrumental in creating conservation projects and recreational assets that make our state a healthier and more resilient place for all of us to live.”



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Keystone Fund: A Historical Perspective

In 1993, The Nature Conservancy became involved in one of the biggest advocacy efforts it had ever embarked on in Pennsylvania—convincing voters to support a permanent fund for conservation, parks, libraries and historic sites. The fund would not involve raising taxes or dipping into other pots of money. Rather, it would be sustained by a percentage of Pennsylvania’s real estate transfer tax.

Advocating for this effort led Cary Nicholas, who served as TNC’s Pennsylvania executive director from 1990 to 1998, to spend almost an entire year working with a broad coalition to pass a statewide referendum on the issue in 1993.

“It was a fast-moving, energizing political campaign,” she remembers, noting that the effort marks one of her proudest accomplishments during a 28-year career with TNC. “TNC was a leader, working closely with other organizations to assemble strong, bipartisan support for the fund.”

According to Nicholas, during that time, the coalition worked across the state—from big cities to small towns and rural areas—to garner support and develop a winning strategy. A first step involved commissioning a statewide poll to gauge where Pennsylvania voters stood. It revealed resounding support for the measure.

In November 1993, 67 percent of Pennsylvania voters cast their ballots in favor of “Key 93.”

“The poll proved to be an accurate predictor of voters’ sentiments,” adds Nicholas. “The tremendous ‘yes vote’ throughout the state, and bipartisan support in the legislature, showed how deeply all Pennsylvanians valued conservation of our natural heritage. The impact has been, and continues to be, huge for conservation and for Pennsylvanians.”

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Keystone Fund: Show Your Support

Twenty-five years after its establishment, the Keystone Fund remains a thriving source of conservation funding in Pennsylvania. This would not be possible without enduring support from the state legislature, community leaders, and Pennsylvanians who appreciate and enjoy nature.



As 2018 comes to a close, we want to express gratitude for all the Keystone Fund has made possible, especially at The Nature Conservancy’s system of preserves. We encourage you to do the same. Here’s what you can do to support this important source of conservation and recreation funding and ensure it continues to benefit future generations:

- Learn more about the Keystone Fund, including projects near you, at [KeystoneFund.org](https://www.KeystoneFund.org).
- Let your state and local elected officials know how important the work of the Keystone Fund is to you.
- Contact our office to learn about how to donate directly or to projects made possible by the Keystone Fund.

